V. ON BEING AWARE

THE QUESTION "WHAT SHALL WE DO ABOUT IT?" IS only asked by those who do not understand the problem. If a problem can be solved at all, to understand it and to know what to do about it are the same thing. On the other hand, doing something about a problem which you do not understand is like trying to clear away darkness by thrusting it aside with your hands. When light is brought, the darkness vanishes at once.

This applies particularly to the problem now before us. How are we to heal the split between "I" and "me," the brain and the body, man and nature, and bring all the vicious circles which it produces to an end? How are we to experience life as something other than a honey trap in which we are the struggling flies? How are we to find security and peace of mind in a world whose very nature is insecurity, impermanence, and unceasing change? All these questions demand a method and a course of action. At the same time, all of them show that the problem has not been understood. We do not need action—yet. We need more light.

Light, here, means awareness—to be aware of life, of experience as it is at this moment, without any judgments or ideas about it. In other words, you have to see and feel what you are experiencing as it *is*, and not as it is named. This very simple "opening of the eyes" brings about the most extraordinary transformation of understanding and living, and shows that many of our most baffling problems are pure illusion. This may sound like an over-simplification because most people imagine themselves to be fully enough aware of the present already, but we shall see that this is far from true.[1]

Because awareness is a view of reality free from ideas and judgments, it is clearly impossible to define and write down *what* it reveals. Anything which can be described is an idea, and I cannot make a positive statement about something—the real world—which is *not* an idea. I shall therefore have to be content with talking about the false impressions which awareness removes, rather than the truth which it reveals. The latter can only be symbolized with words which mean little or nothing to those without a direct understanding of the truth in question.

What is true and positive is too real and too living to be described, and to try to describe it is like putting red paint on a red rose. Therefore most of what follows will have to have a rather negative quality. The truth is revealed by removing things that stand in its light, an art not unlike sculpture, in which the artist creates, not by building, but by hacking away.

We saw that the questions about finding security and peace of mind in an impermanent world showed that the problem had not been understood. Before going any further, it must be clear that the kind of security we are talking about is primarily spiritual and psychological. To exist at all, human beings must have a minimum livelihood in terms of food, drink, and clothing—with the understanding, however, that it cannot last indefinitely. But if the assurance of a minimum livelihood for sixty years would even begin to satisfy the heart of man, human problems would amount to very little. Indeed, the very reason why we do not have this assurance is that we want so much more than the minimum necessities.

It must be obvious, from the start, that there is a contradiction in wanting to be perfectly secure in a universe whose very nature is momentariness and fluidity. But the contradiction lies a little deeper than the mere conflict between the *desire* for security and the *fact* of change. If I want to be secure, that is, protected from the flux of life, I am wanting to be separate from life. Yet it is this very sense of separateness which makes me feel insecure. To be secure means to isolate and fortify the “I,” but it is just the feeling of being an isolated “I” which makes me feel lonely and afraid. In other words, the more security I can get, the more I shall want.

To put it still more plainly: the desire for security and the feeling of insecurity are the same thing. To hold your breath is to lose your breath. A society based on the quest for security is nothing but a breath-retention contest in which everyone is as taut as a drum and as purple as a beet.

We look for this security by fortifying and enclosing ourselves in innumerable ways. We want the protection of being “exclusive” and “special,” seeking to belong to the safest church, the best nation, the highest class, the right set, and the “nice” people. These defenses lead to divisions between us, and so to more insecurity demanding more defenses. Of course it is all done in the sincere belief that we are trying to do the right things and live in the best way; but this, too, is a contradiction.

I can only think seriously of trying to live up to an ideal, to improve myself, if I am split in two pieces. There must be a good “I” who is going to improve the bad “me.” “I,” who has the best intentions, will go to work on wayward “me,” and the tussle between the two will very much stress the difference between them. Consequently “I” will feel more separate than ever, and so merely increase the lonely and cut-off feelings which make “me” behave so badly.

We can hardly begin to consider this problem unless it is clear that the craving for security is itself a pain and a contradiction, and that the more we pursue it, the more painful it becomes. This is true in whatever form security may be conceived.

You want to be happy, to forget yourself, and yet the more you try to forget yourself, the more you remember the self you want to forget. You want to escape from pain, but the more you struggle to escape, the more you inflame the agony. You are afraid and want to be brave, but the effort to be brave is fear trying to run away from itself. You want peace of mind, but the attempt to pacify it is like trying to calm the waves with a flat-iron.

We are all familiar with this kind of vicious circle in the form of worry. We know that worrying is futile, but we go on doing it because calling it futile does not stop it. We worry because we feel unsafe, and want to be safe. Yet it is perfectly useless to say that we *should* not want to be safe. Calling a desire bad names doesn’t get rid of it. What we have to discover is that there is no safety, that seeking it is painful, and that when we imagine that we have found it, we don’t like it. In other words, if we can really understand what we are looking for—that safety is isolation, and what we do to ourselves when we look for it—we shall see that we do not want it at all. No one has to tell you that you *should* not hold your breath for ten minutes. You know that you can’t do it, and that the attempt is most uncomfortable.

The principal thing is to understand that there *is* no safety or security. One of the worst vicious circles is the problem of the alcoholic. In very many cases he knows quite clearly that he is destroying himself, that, for him, liquor is poison, that he actually hates being drunk, and even dislikes the taste of liquor. And yet he drinks. For, dislike it as he may, the experience of not drinking is worse. It gives him the "horrors," for he stands face to face with the unveiled, basic insecurity of the world.

Herein lies the crux of the matter. To stand face to face with insecurity is still not to understand it. To understand it, you must not face it but be it. It is like the Persian story of the sage who came to the door of Heaven and knocked. From within the voice of God asked, "Who is there" and the sage answered, "It is I." "In this House," replied the voice, "there is no room for thee and me." So the sage went away, and spent many years pondering over this answer in deep meditation. Returning a second time, the voice asked the same question, and again the sage answered, "It is I." The door remained closed. After some years he returned for the third time, and, at his knocking, the voice once more demanded, "Who is there?" And the sage cried, "It is thyself!" The door was opened.

To understand that there is no security is far more than to agree with the theory that all things change, more even than to observe the transitoriness of life. The notion of security is based on the feeling that there is something within us which is permanent, something which endures through all the days and changes of life. We are struggling to make sure of the permanence, continuity, and safety of this enduring core, this center and soul of our being which we call "I." For this we think to be the real man—the thinker of our thoughts, the feeler of our feelings, and the knower of our knowledge. We do not actually understand that there is no security until we realize that this "I" does not exist.

Understanding comes through awareness. Can we, then, approach our experience—our sensations, feelings, and thoughts—quite simply, as if we had never known them before, and, without prejudice, look at what is going on? You may ask, "Which experiences, which sensations and feelings, shall we look at?" I will answer, "Which ones *can* you look at?" The answer is that you must look at the ones you have *now*.

That is surely rather obvious. But very obvious things are often overlooked. If a feeling is not present, you are not aware of it. There is no

experience but present experience. What you know, what you are actually aware of, is just what is happening at this moment, and no more.

But what about memories? Surely by remembering I can also know what is past? Very well, remember something. Remember the incident of seeing a friend walking down the street. What are you aware of? You are not actually watching the veritable event of your friend walking down the street. You can't go up and shake hands with him, or get an answer to a question you forgot to ask him at the past time you are remembering. In other words, you are not looking at the actual past at all. You are looking at a present trace of the past.

It is like seeing the tracks of a bird on the sand. I see the present tracks. I do not, at the same time, see the bird making those tracks an hour before. The bird has flown, and I am not aware of him. From the tracks I infer that a bird was there. From memories you infer that there have been past events. But you are not aware of any past events. You know the past only in the present and as part of the present.

We are seeing, then, that our experience is altogether momentary. From one point of view, each moment is so elusive and so brief that we cannot even think about it before it has gone. From another point of view, this moment is always here, since we know no other moment than the present moment. It is always dying, always becoming past more rapidly than imagination can conceive. Yet at the same time it is always being born, always new, emerging just as rapidly from that complete unknown which we call the future. Thinking about it almost makes you breathless.

To say that experience is momentary is really to say that experience and the present moment are the same thing. To say that this moment is always dying, or becoming past, and always being born, or coming out of the unknown, is to say the same thing of experience. The experience you have just had has vanished irretrievably, and all that remains of it is a sort of wake or track in the present, which we call memory. While you can make a guess as to what experience is coming next, in actual fact you do not know. Anything might happen. But the experience which is going on now is, as it were, a newborn infant which vanishes before it can even begin to get older.

While you are watching this present experience, are you aware of *someone* watching it? Can you find, in addition to the experience itself, an experiencer? Can you, at the same time, read *this* sentence and think about yourself reading it? You will find that, to think about yourself reading it,

you must for a brief second stop reading. The first experience is reading. The second experience is the thought, “I am reading.” Can you find any thinker, who is thinking the thought, I am reading?” In other words, when present experience is the thought, “I am reading,” can you think about yourself thinking this thought?

Once again, you must stop thinking just, “I am reading.” You pass to a third experience, which is the thought, “I am thinking that I am reading.” Do not let the rapidity with which these thoughts can change deceive you into the feeling that you think them all at once.

But what has happened? Never at any time were you able to separate yourself from your present thought, or your present experience. The first present experience was reading. When you tried to think about yourself reading, the experience changed, and the next present experience was the thought “I am reading.” You could not separate yourself from this experience without passing on to another. It was “ring around the rosy.” When you were thinking, “I am reading this sentence” you were not reading it. In other words, in each present experience you were only aware of that experience. You were never aware of being aware. You were never able to separate the thinker from the thought, the knower from the known. All you ever found was a new thought, a new experience.

To be aware, then, is to be aware of thoughts, feelings, sensations, desires, and all other forms of experience. Never at any time are you aware of anything which is *not* experience, not a thought or feeling, but instead an experiencer, thinker, or feeler. If this is so, what makes us think that any such thing exists?

We might say, for example, that the “I” who is the thinker is this physical body and brain. But this body is in no way separate from its thoughts and sensations. When you have a sensation, say, of touch, that sensation is part of your body. While that sensation is going on, you cannot move the body away from it any more than you can walk away from a headache or from your own feet. So long as it is present, that sensation is your body and is you. You can remove the body from an uncomfortable chair, but you cannot move it from the sensation of a chair.

The notion of a separate thinker, of an “I” distinct from the experience, comes from memory and from the rapidity with which thought changes. It is like whirling a burning stick to give the illusion of a continuous circle of fire. If you imagine that memory is a direct knowledge of the past rather

than a present experience, you get the illusion of knowing the past and the present at the same time. This suggests that there is something in you distinct from both the past and the present experiences. You reason, “I know this present experience, and it is different from that past experience. If I can compare the two, and notice that experience has changed, I must be something constant and apart.”

But, as a matter of fact, you cannot compare this present experience with a past experience. You can only compare it with a memory of the past, *which is a part of the present experience*. When you see clearly that memory is a form of present experience, it will be obvious that trying to separate yourself from this experience is as impossible as trying to make your teeth bite themselves. There is simply experience. There is not something or someone experiencing experience! You do not feel feelings, think thoughts, or sense sensations any more than you hear hearing, see sight, or smell smelling. “I feel fine” means that a fine feeling is present. It does not mean that there is one thing called an “I” and another separate thing called a feeling, so that when you bring them together this “I” *feels* the fine feeling. There are no feelings but present feelings, and whatever feeling is present is “I.” No one ever found an “I” apart from some present experience, or some experience apart from an “I”—which is only to say that the two are the same thing.

As a mere philosophical argument this is a waste of time. We are not trying to have an “intellectual discussion.” We are being aware of the fact that any separate “I” who thinks thoughts and experiences experience is an illusion. To understand this is to realize that life is entirely momentary, that there is neither permanence nor security, and that there is no “I” which can be protected.

There is a Chinese story of one who came to a great sage, saying, “I have no peace of mind. Please pacify my mind.” The sage answered, “Bring out your mind (your ‘I’) before me, and I will pacify it.” “These many years,” he replied, “I have sought my mind, but I cannot find it.” “There,” concluded the sage, “it is pacified!”

The real reason why human life can be so utterly exasperating and frustrating is not because there are facts called death, pain, fear, or hunger. The madness of the thing is that when such facts are present, we circle, buzz, writhe, and whirl, trying to get the “I” out of the experience. We pretend that we are amoebas, and try to protect ourselves from life by

splitting in two. Sanity, wholeness, and integration lie in the realization that we are not divided, that man and his present experience are one, and that no separate “I” or mind can be found.

While the notion that I am separate from my experience remains, there is confusion and turmoil. Because of this, there is neither awareness nor understanding of experience, and thus no real possibility of assimilating it. To understand this moment I must not try to be divided from it; I must be aware of it with my whole being. This, like refraining from holding my breath for ten minutes, is not something I *should* do. In reality, it is the only thing I *can* do. Everything else is the insanity of attempting the impossible.

To understand music, you must listen to it. But so long as you are thinking, “*I* am listening to this music,” you are not listening. To understand joy or fear, you must be wholly and undividedly aware of it. So long as you are calling it names and saying, “I am happy,” or “I am afraid,” you are not being aware of it. Fear, pain, sorrow, and boredom must remain problems if we do not understand them, but understanding requires a single and undivided mind. This, surely, is the meaning of that strange saying, “If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.”

[1] The word “awareness” is used in the sense given to it by J. Krishnamurti, whose writings discuss this theme with extraordinary perception.

VI. THE MARVELOUS MOMENT

YOU ARE LISTENING TO A SONG. SUDDENLY I ASK, "AT this moment, who are you?" How will you answer this question immediately and spontaneously, without stopping to find words? If the question does not shock you out of listening, you will answer by humming the song. If the question surprised you, you will answer, "At this moment, who are you?" But if you stop to think, you will try to tell me, not about this moment, but about the past. I shall get information about your name and address, your business and personal history. But I asked who you *are*, not who you *were*. For to be aware of reality, of the living present, is to discover that at each moment the experience is all. There is nothing else beside it—no experience of "you" experiencing the experience.

Even in our most apparently self-conscious moments, the "self" of which we are conscious is always some particular feeling or sensation—of muscular tensions, of warmth or cold, of pain or irritation, of breath or of pulsing blood. There is never a sensation of what senses sensations, just as there is no meaning or possibility in the notion of smelling one's nose or kissing one's own lips.

In times of happiness and pleasure, we are usually ready enough to be aware of the moment, and to let the experience be all. In such moments we "forget ourselves," and the mind makes no attempt to divide itself from itself, to be separate from experience. But with the arrival of pain, whether

physical or emotional, whether actual or anticipated, the split begins and the circle goes round and round.

As soon as it becomes clear that “I” cannot possibly escape from the reality of the present, since “I” is nothing other than what I know now, this inner turmoil must stop. No possibility remains but to be aware of pain, fear, boredom, or grief in the same complete way that one is aware of pleasure. The human organism has the most wonderful powers of adaptation to both physical and psychological pain. But these can only come into full play when the pain is not being constantly restimulated by this inner effort to get away from it, to separate the “I” from the feeling. The effort creates a state of tension in which the pain thrives. But when the tension ceases, mind and body begin to absorb the pain as water reacts to a blow or cut.

There is another story of a Chinese sage who was asked, “How shall we escape the heat?”—meaning, of course, the heat of suffering. He answered, “Go right into the middle of the fire.” “But how, then, shall we escape the scorching flame?” “No further pain will trouble you!” We do not need to go as far as China. The same idea comes in *The Divine Comedy*, where Dante and Virgil find that the way out of Hell lies at its very center.

In moments of great joy we do not, as a rule, stop to think, “I am happy,” or, “This is joy.” Ordinarily, we do not pause to think thoughts of this kind until the joy is past its peak, or unless there is some anxiety that it will go away. At such times we are so aware of the moment that no attempt is made to compare its experience with other experiences. For this reason we do not name it, for names which are not mere exclamations are based on comparisons. “Joy” is distinguished from “sorrow” by contrast, by comparing one state of mind with the other. Had we never known joy, it would be impossible to identify sorrow as sorrow.

But in reality we cannot compare joy with sorrow. Comparison is possible only by the very rapid alternation of two states of mind, and you cannot switch back and forth between the genuine feelings of joy and sorrow as you can shift your eyes between a cat and a dog. Sorrow can only be compared with the *memory* of joy, which is not at all the same thing as joy itself.

Like words, memories never really succeed in “catching” reality. Memories are somewhat abstract, being a knowledge *about* things rather than *of* things. Memory never captures the essence, the present intensity, the

concrete reality of an experience. It is, as it were, the corpse of an experience, from which the life has vanished. What we know by memory, we know only at secondhand. Memories are dead because fixed. The memory of your deceased grandmother can only repeat what your grandmother was. But the real, present grandmother could always do or say something new, and you were never absolutely sure what she would do next.

There are, then, two ways of understanding an experience. The first is to compare it with the memories of other experiences, and so to name and define it. This is to interpret it in accordance with the dead and the past. The second is to be aware of it as it is, as when, in the intensity of joy, we forget past and future, let the present be all, and thus do not even stop to think, "I am happy."

Both ways of understanding have their uses. But they correspond to the difference between knowing a thing by words and knowing it immediately. A menu is very useful, but it is no substitute for the dinner. A guidebook is an admirable tool, but it is hardly to be compared with the country it describes.

The point, then, is that when we try to understand the present by comparing it with memories, we do not understand it as deeply as when we are aware of it without comparison. This, however, is usually the way in which we approach unpleasant experiences. Instead of being aware of them as they are, we try to deal with them in terms of the past. The frightened or lonely person begins at once to think, "I'm afraid," or, "I'm so lonely."

This is, of course, an attempt to avoid the experience. We don't want to be aware of *this* present. But as we cannot get out of the present, our only escape is into memories. Here we feel on safe ground, for the past is the fixed and the known—but also, of course, the dead. Thus to try to get out of, say, fear we endeavor at once to be separate from it and to "fix" it by interpreting it in terms of memory, in terms of what is already fixed and known. In other words, we try to adapt ourselves to the mysterious present by comparing it with the (remembered) past, by naming and "identifying" it.

This would be all very well if you were trying to get away from something from which you *can* get away. It is a useful process for knowing when to come in out of the rain. But it does not tell you how to live with things from which you cannot get away, which are already part of yourself.

Your body does not eliminate poisons by knowing their names. To try to control fear or depression or boredom by calling them names is to resort to superstition of trust in curses and invocations.

It is so easy to see why this does not work. Obviously, we try to know, name, and define fear in order to make it "objective," that is, separate from "I." But why are we trying to be separate from fear? Because we are afraid. In other words, fear is trying to separate itself from fear, as if one could fight fire with fire.

And this is not all. The more we accustom ourselves to understanding the present in terms of memory, the unknown by the known, the living by the dead, the more desiccated and embalmed, the more joyless and frustrated life becomes. So protected from life, man becomes a sort of mollusc encrusted in a hard shell of "tradition," so that when at last reality breaks through, as it must, the tide of pent-up fear runs wild.

If, on the other hand, you are aware of fear, you realize that, because this feeling is now yourself, escape is impossible. You see that calling it "fear" tells you little or nothing about it, for the comparison and the naming is based, not on past experience, but on memory. You have then no choice but to be aware of it with your whole being as an entirely new experience. Indeed, *every* experience is in this sense new, and at every moment of our lives we are in the midst of the new and the unknown. At this point you receive the experience without resisting it or naming it, and the whole sense of conflict between "I" and the present reality vanishes.

For most of us this conflict is ever gnawing within us because our lives are one long effort to resist the unknown, the real present in which we live, which is the unknown in the midst of coming into being. Living thus, we never really learn to live with it. At every moment we are cautious, hesitant, and on the defensive. And all to no avail, for life thrusts us into the unknown willy-nilly, and resistance is as futile and exasperating as trying to swim against a roaring torrent.

The art of living in this "predicament" is neither careless drifting on the one hand nor fearful clinging to the past and the known on the other. It consists in being completely sensitive to each moment, in regarding it as utterly new and unique, in having the mind open and wholly receptive.

This is not a philosophical theory but an experiment. One has to make the experiment to understand that it brings into play altogether new powers of adaptation to life, of literally *absorbing* pain and insecurity. It is as hard to

describe how this absorption works as to explain the beating of one's heart or the formation of genes. The "open" mind does this as most of us breathe: without being able to explain it at all. The principle of the thing is clearly something like *judo*, the gentle (*ju*) way (*do*) of mastering an opposing force by giving in to it.

The natural world gives us many examples of the great effectiveness of this way. The Chinese philosophy of which *judo* itself is an expression—Taoism—drew attention to the power of water to overcome all obstacles by its gentleness and pliability. It showed how the supple willow survives the tough pine in a snowstorm, for whereas the unyielding branches of the pine accumulate snow until they crack, the springy boughs of the willow bend under its weight, drop the snow, and jump back again.

If, when swimming, you are caught in a strong current, it is fatal to resist. You must swim with it and gradually edge to the side. One who falls from a height with stiff limbs will break them, but if he relaxes like a cat he will fall safely. A building without "give" in its structure will easily collapse in storm or earthquake, and a car without the cushioning of tires and springs will soon come apart on the road.

The mind has just the same powers, for it has *give* and can *absorb* shocks like water or a cushion. But this giving way to an opposing force is not at all the same thing as running away. A body of water does not run away when you push it; it simply gives at the point of the push and encloses your hand. A shock absorber does not fall down like a bowling-pin when struck; it gives, and yet stays in the same place. To run away is the only defense of something *rigid* against an overwhelming force. Therefore the good shock absorber has not only "give," but also stability or "weight."

This weight is likewise a function of the mind, and appears in the much-misunderstood phenomenon of laziness. Significantly enough, nervous and frustrated people are always busy, even in being idle, such idleness being the "laziness" of fear, not of rest. But the mind-body is a system which conserves and accumulates energy. While doing this it is properly lazy. When the energy is stored, it is just as happy to move, and yet to move skillfully—along the line of least resistance. Thus it is not only necessity, but also laziness, which is the mother of invention. One may observe the unhurried, "heavy" movements of a skillful laborer at some hard task, and even in going against gravity the good mountaineer uses gravity, taking

slow, heavy strides. He seems to tack up the slope, like a sailboat against the wind.

In the light of these principles, how does the mind absorb suffering? It discovers that resistance and escape—the "I" process—is a false move. The pain is inescapable, and resistance as a defense only makes it worse; the whole system is jarred by the shock. Seeing the impossibility of this course, it must act according to its nature—remain stable and absorb.

To remain stable is to refrain from trying to separate yourself from a pain because you know that you cannot. Running away from fear is fear, fighting pain is pain, trying to be brave is being scared. If the mind is in pain, the mind is pain. The thinker has no other form than his thought. There is no escape. But so long as you are not aware of the inseparability of thinker and thought, you will try to escape.

From this follows, quite naturally, absorption. It is no effort; the mind does it by itself. Seeing that there is no escape from the pain, the mind yields to it, absorbs it, and becomes conscious of just pain without any "I" feeling it or resisting it. It experiences pain in the same complete, unselfconscious way in which it experiences pleasure. Pain is the nature of this present moment, and I can only live in this moment.

Sometimes, when resistance ceases, the pain simply goes away or dwindles to an easily tolerable ache. At other times it remains, but the absence of any resistance brings about a way of feeling pain so unfamiliar as to be hard to describe. The pain is no longer *problematic*. I feel it, but there is no urge to get rid of it, for I have discovered that pain and the effort to be separate from it are the same thing. Wanting to get out of pain *is* the pain; it is not the "reaction" of an "I" distinct from the pain. When you discover this, the desire to escape "merges" into the pain itself and *vanishes*.

Discounting aspirin for the moment, you cannot remove your head from a headache as you can remove your hand from a flame. "You" equals "head" equals "ache." When you actually see that you *are* the pain, pain ceases to be a motive, for there is no one to be moved. It becomes, in the true sense, of no consequence. It hurts—period.

This, however, is not an experiment to be held in reserve, as a trick, for moments of crisis. It is a way of life. It means being aware, alert, and sensitive to the present moment always, in all actions and relations whatsoever, beginning at this instant. This, in turn, depends upon seeing that you have really no choice but to be aware—because you cannot

separate yourself from the present and you cannot define it. You can, indeed, refuse to admit this, but only at the cost of the immense and futile effort of spending your whole life resisting the inevitable.

Once this is understood, it is really absurd to say that there is a choice or an alternative between these two ways of life, between resisting the stream in fruitless panic, and having one's eyes opened to a new world, transformed, and ever new with wonder. The key is understanding. To ask how to do this, what is the technique or method, what are the steps and rules, is to miss the point utterly. Methods are for creating things which do not yet exist. We are concerned here with understanding something which *is* —the present moment. This is not a psychological or spiritual discipline for self-improvement. It is simply being aware of this present experience, and realizing that you can neither define it nor divide yourself from it. There is no rule but "Look!"

It is no mere poetic sentiment to say that, with the mind thus opened, we look into a new world, as new as on the first day of creation "when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." By trying to understand everything in terms of memory, the past, and words, we have, as it were, had our noses in the guidebook for most of our lives, and have never looked at the view. Whitehead's criticism of traditional education is applicable to our whole way of living:

> We are too exclusively bookish in our scholastic routine.… In the Garden of Eden Adam saw the animals before he named them: in the traditional system, children named the animals before they saw them.[1]

In the widest sense of the word, to name is to interpret experience by the past, to translate it into terms of memory, to bind the unknown into the system of the known. Civilized man knows of hardly any other way of understanding things. Everybody, everything, has to have its label, its number, certificate, registration, classification. What is not classified is irregular, unpredictable, and dangerous. Without passport, birth certificate, or membership in some nation, one's existence is not recognized. If you do not agree with the capitalists, they call you a communist, and *vice versa*. A person who agrees with neither point of view is fast becoming unintelligible.

That there is a way of looking at life apart from all conceptions, beliefs, opinions, and theories is the remotest of all possibilities from the modern mind. If such a point of view exists, it can only be in the vacant brain of a moron. We suffer from the delusion that the entire universe is held in order by the categories of human thought, fearing that if we do not hold to them with the utmost tenacity, everything will vanish into chaos.

We must repeat: memory, thought, language, and logic are essential to human life. They are one half of sanity. But a person, a society, which is only half sane is insane. To look at life without words is not to lose the ability to form words—to think, remember, and plan. To be silent is not to lose your tongue. On the contrary, it is only through silence that one can discover something new to talk about. One who talked incessantly, without stopping to look and listen, would repeat himself *ad nauseam*.

It is the same with thinking, which is really silent talking. It is not, by itself, open to the discovery of anything new, for its only novelties are simply rearrangements of old words and ideas. There was a time when language was constantly being enriched by new words—a time when men, like Adam, saw things before they named them. Today, almost all new words are rearrangements of old words, for we are no longer thinking creatively. By this I do not mean that we ought all to be popping with inventions and revolutionary discoveries. This is the—always rare—power of those who can both see the unknown and interpret it. For most of us, the other half of sanity lies simply in seeing and enjoying the unknown, just as we can enjoy music without knowing either how it is written or how the body hears it.

Certainly the revolutionary thinker must go beyond thought. He knows that almost all his best ideas come to him when thinking has stopped. He may have struggled and struggled to understand a problem in terms of old ways of thinking, only to find it impossible. But when thought stops from exhaustion, the mind is open to see the problem as it is—not as it is verbalized—and at once it is understood.

But going beyond thought is not reserved to men of genius. It is open to all of us in so far as “the mystery of life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced.” It is given to many to be seers, but to few to be prophets. Many can listen to music, but few can perform and compose. But you cannot even listen if you can hear only in terms of the past. What should we make of one of Mozart’s symphonies if our ears were attuned

only to the music of tom-toms? We might get the rhythms, but almost nothing of the harmony and melody. In other words, we should fail to discover an essential element of the music. To be able to hear, much less write, such a symphony men had to discover new noises—the vibrations of catgut, the sound of air in a tube, and the hum of a plucked wire. They had to discover the whole world of tone, as something entirely different from pulse.

If I can only conceive pulse, I cannot appreciate tone. If I can think of painting only as a way of making colored photographs without a camera, I can see nothing but ineptitude in a Chinese landscape. We learn nothing of very much importance when it can be explained entirely in terms of past experience. If it were possible to understand all things in terms of what we know already, we could convey the sense of color to a blind man with nothing but sound, taste, touch, and smell.

If this is true in the various arts and sciences, it is a thousand times more true when we come to the understanding of life in a larger sense and want to have some knowledge of the ultimate Reality, or God. It is surely absurd to seek God in terms of a preconceived idea of what God is. To seek thus is only to find what we know already, which is why it is so easy to deceive oneself into all manner of "supernatural" experiences and visions. To believe in God and to look for the God you believe in is simply to seek confirmation of an opinion. To ask for a revelation of God's will, and then to "test" it by reference to your preconceived moral standards is to make a mockery of asking. You knew the answer already. Seeking for "God" in this way is no more than asking for the stamp of absolute authority and certainty on what you believe in any case, for a guarantee that the unknown and the future will be a continuation of what you want to retain from the past—a bigger and better fortress for "I." *Ein feste Burg!*

If we are open only to discoveries which will accord with what we know already, we may as well stay shut. This is why the marvelous achievements of science and technology are of so little real use to us. It is in vain that we can predict and control the course of events in the future, unless we know how to live in the present. It is in vain that doctors prolong life if we spend the extra time being anxious to live still longer. It is in vain that engineers devise faster and easier means of travel if the new sights that we see are merely sorted and understood in terms of old prejudices. It is in vain that we

get the power of the atom if we are just to continue in the rut of blowing people up.

Tools such as these, as well as the tools of language and thought, are of real use to men only if they are awake—not lost in the dreamland of past and future, but in the closest touch with that point of experience where reality can alone be discovered: this moment. Here life is alive, vibrant, vivid, and present, containing depths which we have hardly begun to explore. But to see and understand it at all, the mind must not be divided into "I" and "this experience." The moment must be what it always is—all that you are and all that you know. In *this* house there is no room for thee and me!

[1] A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*. (Cambridge, 1933) P. 249.

VII. THE TRANSFORMATION OF LIFE

THE WHITE MAN FANCIES HIMSELF AS A PRACTICAL person who wants to "get results." He is impatient with theory, and with any discussion which does not immediately get down to concrete applications. This is why the behavior of Western civilization might be described, in general, as "Much Ado About Nothing." The proper meaning of "theory" is not idle speculation but *vision*, and it was rightly said that "where there is no vision the people perish."

But vision in this sense does not mean dreams and ideals for the future. It means understanding of life as it is, of what we are, and what we are doing. Without such understanding it is simply ridiculous to talk of being practical and getting results. It is like walking busily in a fog: you just go round and round. You do not know where you are going, nor what results you really want.

To minds that think in this way, what we have discussed so far may seem too theoretical. These ideas are all very well, but do they work? Yet I must ask, "What do you mean by work?" The usual "working test" of a philosophy is whether it makes people better and happier, whether it results in peace, cooperation, and prosperity. Yet this is a meaningless criterion without much "theoretical" understanding. What do you mean by happiness? What are "better" people better for? About what will you co-operate? What will you do with peace and prosperity?

The answer to these questions depends entirely on what we are and what we actually want now. If, for example, we want at the same time both peace and isolation, brotherhood and security for "I," happiness and permanence, our wants are contradictory. Their results, however practical we may be about getting them, will be further contradictions. It is the old story of wanting to have your cake and eat it—to which the only possible conclusion is that you put it in your stomach and *keep* it there until you have violent indigestion.

If we must be nationalists and have a sovereign state, we cannot also expect to have world peace. If we want to get everything at the lowest possible cost, we cannot expect to get the best possible quality, the balance between the two being mediocrity. If we make it an ideal to be morally superior, we cannot at the same time avoid self-righteousness. If we cling to belief in God, we cannot likewise have faith, since faith is not clinging but letting go.

When we have made up our minds as to what we *do* want, there remain indeed many practical and technical problems. But there is no point at all in discussing these until we have made up our minds. There is, in turn, no possibility of making up our minds so long as they are split in two, so long as "I" am one thing and "experience" another. If the mind is the directive force behind action, the mind and its vision of life must be healed before action can be anything but conflict.

Something must therefore be said about the healed vision of life which comes with full awareness, for it involves a deep transformation of our view of the world. As well as words can describe it, this transformation consists in knowing and feeling that the world is an organic unity.

In the ordinary way, we "know" this as a matter of information but do not feel it to be true. Certainly most people feel separate from everything that surrounds them. On the one hand there is myself, and on the other the rest of the universe. I am not rooted in the earth like a tree. I rattle around independently. I seem to be the center of everything, and yet cut off and alone. I can feel what is going on inside my own body, but I can only guess what is going on in others. My conscious mind must have its roots and origins in the most unfathomable depths of being, yet it feels as if it lived all by itself in this tight little skull.

Nevertheless, the physical reality is that my body exists only in relation to this universe, and in fact I am as attached to it and dependent on it as a

leaf on a tree. I feel cut off only because I am split within myself, because I try to be divided from my own feelings and sensations. What I feel and sense therefore seems foreign to me. And on being aware of the unreality of this division, the universe does not seem foreign any more.

For I am what I know; what I know is I. The sensation of a house across the street or of a star in outer space is no less I than an itch on the sole of my foot or an idea in my brain. In another sense, I am also what I do not know. I am not aware of my own brain *as* a brain. In just the same way, I am not aware of the house across the street as a thing apart from my sensation of it. I know my brain as thoughts and feelings, and I know the house as sensations. In the same way and sense that I do not know my own brain, or the house as a thing-in-itself, I do not know the private thoughts in your brain.

But my brain, which is also I, your brain and the thoughts within it, as well as the house across the street, are all forms of an inextricably interwoven process called the real world. Conscious or unconscious of it as I may be, it is all I in the sense that the sun, the air, and human society are just as vital to me as my brain or my lungs. If, then, this brain is my brain—unaware of it as I am—the sun is my sun, the air my air, and society my society.

Certainly I cannot command the sun to be egg-shaped, nor force your brain to think differently. I cannot see the inside of the sun, nor can I share your private feelings. Yet neither can I change the shape or structure of my own brain, nor have a sensation of it as a contraption like a cauliflower. But if my brain is nonetheless I, the sun is I, the air is I, and society, of which you are a member, is also I—for all these things are just as essential to my existence as my brain.

That there is a sun apart from my sensation of it is an inference. The fact that I have a brain, though I cannot see it, is likewise an inference. We know about these things only in theory, and not by immediate experience. But this "external" world of theoretical objects is, apparently, just as much a unity as the "internal" world of experience. From experience I infer that it exists. And because experience is a unity—I am my sensations—I must likewise infer that this theoretical universe is a unity, that my body and the world form a single process.

Now there have been many theories about the unity of the universe. But they have not delivered human beings from the isolation of egotism, from

conflict, and from the fear of life, because there is a world of difference between an inference and a feeling. You can reason that the universe is a unity without feeling it to be so. You can establish the theory that your body is a movement in an unbroken process which includes all suns and stars, and yet continue to feel separate and lonely. For the feeling will not correspond to the theory until you have also discovered the unity of inner experience. Despite all theories, you will feel that you are isolated from life so long as you are divided within.

But you will cease to feel isolated when you recognize, for example, that you do not *have* a sensation of the sky: you *are* that sensation. For all purposes of feeling, your sensation of the sky is the sky, and there is no "you" apart from what you sense, feel, and know. This is why the mystics and many of the poets give frequent utterance to the feeling that they are "one with the All," or "united with God," or, as Sir Edwin Arnold expressed it—

Foregoing self, the universe grows I.

Sometimes, indeed, this feeling is purely sentimental, the poet being "one with Nature" just so long as she is on her best behavior.

I live not in myself, but I become
Portion of that around me; and to me
High mountains are a feeling, but the hum
Of human cities torture: I can see
Nothing to loathe in nature, save to be
A link reluctant in a fleshly chain,
Classed among creatures, when the soul can flee,
And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain
Of ocean, or the stars, mingle, and not in vain.

This rural rapture from Byron is quite beside the point. He has only come to terms with nature to the extent that he has befriended his own human nature. The fly likes the sweetness of the honey, but not its stickiness, which makes him

A link reluctant in a fleshly chain,
Classed among creatures.

The sentimentalist does not look into the depths of nature and see

Sluggish existences grazing there, suspended, or slowly crawling close to the bottom:…

The leaden-eyed shark, the walrus, the turtle, the hairy sea-leopard, and the sting-ray,

Passions there, wars, pursuits, tribes—sight in those ocean depths—breathing that thick breathing air.

Man has to discover that everything which he beholds in nature—the clammy foreign-feeling world of the ocean's depths, the wastes of ice, the reptiles of the swamp, the spiders and scorpions, the deserts of lifeless planets—has its counterpart within himself. He is not, then, at one with himself until he realizes that this "under side" of nature and the feelings of horror which it gives him are also "I."

For all the qualities which we admire or loathe in the world around us are reflections from within—though from a within that is also a beyond, unconscious, vast, unknown. Our feelings about the crawling world of the wasps' nest and the snake pit are feelings about hidden aspects of our own bodies and brains, and of all their potentialities for unfamiliar creeps and shivers, for unsightly diseases, and unimaginable pains.

I do not know whether it is true, but it is said that some of the great sages and "holy men" have an apparently supernatural power over beasts and reptiles which are always dangerous to ordinary mortals. If this is true, it is certainly because they are able to live at peace with the "beasts and reptiles" in themselves. They need not call the wild elephant Behemoth or the sea-monster Leviathan; they address them familiarly as "Long-Nose" and "Slimy."

The sense of unity with the "All" is not, however, a nebulous state of mind, a sort of trance, in which all form and distinction is abolished, as if man and the universe merged into a luminous mist of pale mauve. Just as process and form, energy and matter, myself and experience, are names for, and ways of looking at, the same thing—so one and many, unity and multiplicity, identity and difference, are not mutually exclusive opposites: they are each other, much as the body is its various organs. To discover that the many are the one, and that the one is the many, is to realize that both are words and noises representing what is at once obvious to sense and feeling, and an enigma to logic and description.

A young man in search of spiritual wisdom put himself under the instruction of a celebrated holy man. The sage made him his personal

attendant, and after some months the young man complained that thus far he had received no instruction. “What do you mean!” exclaimed the holy man. “When you brought me my rice, didn’t I eat it? When you brought me my tea, didn’t I drink it? When you made salutations to me, didn’t I return them? When have I ever neglected to give you instruction?” “I’m afraid I don’t understand,” said the young man, totally mystified. “When you want to see into it,” answered the sage, “see into it directly. When you begin to think about it, it is altogether missed.”

Plucking chrysanthemums along the East fence;
Gazing in silence at the southern hills;
The birds flying home in pairs
Through the soft mountain air of dusk—
In these things there is a deep meaning,
But when we are about to express it,
We suddenly forget the words.

The meaning is not the contemplative, twilight, and, perhaps, superficially idyllic atmosphere beloved of Chinese poets. This is already expressed, and the poet does not gild the lily. He will not, like so many Western poets, turn philosopher and say that he is “one with” the flowers, the fence, the hills, and the birds. This, too, is gilding the lily, or, in his own Oriental idiom, “putting legs on a snake.” For when you really understand that you are what you see and know, you do not run around the countryside thinking, “I *am* all this.” There is simply “all this.”

The feeling that we stand face-to-face with the world, cut off and set apart, has the greatest influence on thought and action. Philosophers, for example, often fail to recognize that their remarks about the universe apply also to themselves and their remarks. If the universe is meaningless, so is the statement that it is so. If this world is a vicious trap, so is its accuser, and the pot is calling the kettle black.

In the strictest sense, we cannot actually think about life and reality at all, because this would have to include thinking about thinking, thinking about thinking about thinking, and so *ad infinitum*. One can only attempt a rational, descriptive philosophy of the universe on the assumption that one is totally separate from it. But if you and your thoughts are part of this universe, you cannot stand outside them to describe them. This is why all

philosophical and theological systems must ultimately fall apart. To “know” reality you cannot stand outside it and define it; you must enter into it, be it, and feel it.

Speculative philosophy, as we know it in the West, is almost entirely a symptom of the divided mind, of man trying to stand outside himself and his experience in order to verbalize and define it. It is a vicious circle, like everything else which the divided mind attempts.

On the other hand, the realization that the mind is actually undivided must have a corresponding and equally far-reaching influence on thought and action. As the philosopher tries to stand outside himself and his thought, so, as we have seen, the ordinary man tries to stand outside himself and his emotions and sensations, his feelings and desires. The result is a fantastic confusion and misdirection of conduct which discovery of the mind’s unity must bring to an end.

So long as the mind is split, life is perpetual conflict, tension, frustration, and disillusion. Suffering is piled on suffering, fear on fear, and boredom on boredom. The more the fly struggles to get out of the honey, the faster he is stuck. Under the pressure of so much strain and futility, it is no wonder at all that men seek release in violence and sensationalism, and in the reckless exploitation of their bodies, their appetites, the material world, and their fellow men. What this must add to the necessary and unavoidable pains of existence is incalculable.

But the undivided mind is free from this tension of trying always to stand outside oneself and to be elsewhere than here and now. Each moment is lived completely, and there is thus a sense of fulfillment and completeness. The divided mind comes to the dinner table and pecks at one dish after another, rushing on without digesting anything to find one better than the last. It finds nothing good, because there is nothing which it really tastes.

When, on the other hand, you realize that you live in, that indeed you *are* this moment now, and no other, that apart from this there is no past and no future, you must relax and taste to the full, whether it be pleasure or pain. At once it becomes obvious why this universe exists, why conscious beings have been produced, why sensitive organs, why space, time, and change. The whole problem of justifying nature, of trying to make life mean something in terms of its future, disappears utterly. Obviously, it all exists for this moment. It is a dance, and when you are dancing you are not intent

on getting somewhere. You go round and round, but not under the illusion that you are pursuing something, or fleeing from the jaws of hell.

How long have the planets been circling the sun? Are they getting anywhere, and do they go faster and faster in order to arrive? How often has the spring returned to the earth? Does it come faster and fancier every year, to be sure to be better than last spring, and to hurry on its way to the spring that shall out-spring all springs?

The meaning and purpose of dancing is the dance. Like music, also, it is fulfilled in each moment of its course. You do not play a sonata *in order* to reach the final chord, and if the meanings of things were simply in ends, composers would write nothing but finales. It might, however, be observed in passing that the music specially characteristic of our culture is progressive in some respects, and does at times seem to be decidedly on its way to a future climax. But when it gets there, it does not know what to do with itself. Beethoven, Brahms, and Wagner were particularly guilty of working up to colossal climaxes and conclusions, and then blasting away at the same chord over and over again, ruining the moment by being reluctant to leave it.

When each moment becomes an expectation life is deprived of fulfillment, and death is dreaded for it seems that here expectation must come to an end. While there is life there is hope—and if one lives on hope, death is indeed the end. But to the undivided mind, death is another moment, complete like every moment, and cannot yield its secret unless lived to the full—

And I laid me down with a will.

Death is the epitome of the truth that in each moment we are thrust into the unknown. Here all clinging to security is compelled to cease, and wherever the past is dropped away and safety abandoned, life is renewed. Death is the unknown in which all of us lived before birth.

Nothing is more creative than death, since it is the whole secret of life. It means that the past must be abandoned, that the unknown cannot be avoided, that “I” cannot continue, and that nothing can be ultimately fixed. When a man knows this, he lives for the first time in his life. By holding his breath, he loses it. By letting it go he finds it.

Und so lang du das nicht hast,
Dieses: stirb und werde,
Bist du nur ein trüber Gast
Auf der dunklen Erde.[1]

[1] Goethe, *West-östlicher Divan*. “As long as you do not know how to die and come to life again, you are but a sorry traveler on this dark earth.”

VIII. CREATIVE MORALITY

IT IS PERHAPS A PARADOX TO TALK ABOUT CREATIVE morality. For "morality" is derived from a word meaning custom and convention, and the regulation of life by rules. But morality has also come to mean the working of love in human relations, and in this sense we can speak of a morality which is creative. St. Augustine described it as, "Love, and do what you will." But the problem has always been how to love what you do not like.

If morality is the art of living together, it is clear that rules, or rather techniques, have a place in it. For many of the problems of a community are technical problems—the distribution of wealth and population, the proper management of natural resources, the organization of family life, the care of the sick and disabled, and the harmonious adaptation of individual differences.

The moralist is therefore a technician who is consulted on these problems as one consults an architect on building a house or an engineer on erecting a bridge. Like medicine, shoe-making, cookery, tailoring, farming, and carpentry, living together requires a certain "know-how." It demands the acquisition and use of certain skills.

But the moralist has, in practice, become much more than a technical consultant. He has become a scold. From his pulpit or his study he harangues the human race, issuing praise and blame—mostly blame—like fire from the mouth of a dragon. For people do not take his advice. They ask how it is best to act under such-and-such circumstances. He tells them, and they seem to agree that he is right. But then they go away and do something different, for they find his advice too difficult or have a strong

desire to do the opposite. This happens so regularly that the moralist loses his temper and begins to call them bad names. When this has no effect, he resorts to physical violence, implementing his advice with policemen, punishments, and prisons. For the community is its own moralist. It elects and pays judges, policemen, and preachers, as if to say, “When I am difficult, please kick me.”

At first sight the problem seems to boil down to this: Morals are for avoiding an unfair distribution of pleasure and pain. This means that some individuals must get less pleasure and more pain. As a rule, these individuals will only submit to the sacrifice under the threat of still more pain if they do not co-operate. This is based on the assumption that every man is for himself, and observes the interests of the community only to the extent that these are obviously his own interests.

From this, moralists have evolved the theory that man is basically selfish, or that he has an inherent bias towards evil. The “natural” man lives for one motive: to protect his body from pain and to associate it with pleasure. Because he can only feel with his own body, he has little interest in the feelings of other bodies. Therefore he will only take interest in other bodies under the stimulus of rewards and punishments, that is, by an exploitation of his self-interest in the interest of the community.

Happily, the problem is not quite so simple. For among the things that give man pleasure are relations with other human beings—conversation, eating together, singing, dancing, having children, and cooperation in work which “many hands make light.” Indeed, one of the highest pleasures is to be more or less unconscious of one’s own existence, to be absorbed in interesting sights, sounds, places, and people. Conversely, one of the greatest pains is to be self-conscious, to feel unabsorbed and cut off from the community and the surrounding world.

But this whole problem has no solution while we think about it in terms of the pleasure-pain motivation, or, indeed, in terms of any “motivation” at all. For man has a moral problem, which other community-living animals do not have, for the very reason that he is so much concerned with motives. If it is true that man is necessarily motivated by the pleasure-pain principle, there is no point whatsoever in discussing human conduct. Motivated conduct is determined conduct; it will be what it will be, no matter what anyone has to say about it. There can be no creative morality unless man has the possibility of freedom.

This is where the moralists make their mistake. If they want man to change his way of life, they must assume that he is free, for if he is not, all the raging and protesting in the world will make no difference. On the other hand, a man who is acting from the fear of a moralist's threats or from the lure of his promises is not making a free act! If man is not free, threats and promises may modify his conduct, but they will not change it in any essential respect. If he is free, threats and promises will not make him use his freedom.

The meaning of freedom can never be grasped by the divided mind. If I feel separate from my experience, and from the world, freedom will seem to be the extent to which I can push the world around, and fate the extent to which the world pushes me around. But to the whole mind there is no contrast of "I" and the world. There is just one process acting, and it does everything that happens. It raises my little finger and it creates earthquakes. Or, if you want to put it that way, *I* raise my little finger and also make earthquakes. No one fates and no one is being fated.

Of course this is a strange view of freedom. We are accustomed to think that, if there is any freedom at all, it resides, not in nature, but in the separate human will and its power of choice.

But what we ordinarily mean by choice is not freedom. Choices are usually decisions motivated by pleasure and pain, and the divided mind acts with the sole purpose of getting "I" into pleasure and out of pain. But the best pleasures are those for which we do not plan, and the worst part of pain is expecting it and trying to get away from it when it has come. You cannot plan to be happy. You can plan to exist, but in themselves existence and non-existence are neither pleasurable nor painful. I am even assured by doctors that there are circumstances under which death can be a highly pleasant experience.

The sense of not being free comes from trying to do things which are impossible and even meaningless. You are not "free" to draw a square circle, to live without a head, or to stop certain reflex actions. These are not obstacles to freedom; they are the conditions of freedom. I am not free to draw a circle if perchance it should turn out to be a square circle. I am not, thank heaven, free to walk out of doors and leave my head at home. Likewise I am not free to live in any moment but this one, or to separate myself from my feelings. In short I am not free when I am trying to do

something contradictory, such as to move without changing position, or to burn my finger without feeling pain.

On the other hand, I am free, the world process is free, to do anything which is not a contradiction. The question then arises: is it a contradiction, is it impossible, to act or to decide without pleasure as the ultimate aim? The theory that we must inevitably do what gives us the greater pleasure or the lesser pain, is a meaningless assertion based on verbal confusion. To say that I decide to do something because it pleases me says only that I decide to do it because I decide to do it. If "pleasure" is defined in the beginning as "what I prefer," then what I prefer will always be pleasure. If I prefer pain, like a masochist, then pain will be pleasure. In short, the theory begs the question at the start by saying that pleasure means what we desire: therefore anything that we desire is pleasure.

But I fall straight into contradiction when I try to act and decide in order to be happy, when I make "being pleased" my future goal. For the more my actions are directed towards future pleasures, the more I am incapable of enjoying any pleasures at all. For all pleasures are present, and nothing save complete awareness of the present can even begin to guarantee future happiness. I can act in order to eat tomorrow, or take a trip to the mountains next week, but there is really no way of being certain that this will make me happy. On the contrary, it is common experience that nothing ruins a "pleasure" so much as watching yourself in the midst of it to see whether it pleases you. You can only live in one moment at a time, and you cannot think simultaneously about listening to the waves and whether you are enjoying listening to the waves. Contradictions of this kind are the only real types of action without freedom.

There is another theory of determinism which states that all our actions are motivated by "unconscious mental mechanisms," and that for this reason even the most spontaneous decisions are not free. This is but another example of split-mindedness, for what is the difference between "me" and "mental mechanisms" whether conscious or unconscious? *Who* is being moved by these processes? The notion that anyone is being motivated comes from the persisting illusion of "I." The real man, the organism-in-relation-to-the-universe, *is* this unconscious motivation. And because he *is* it, he is not being moved *by* it. In other words, it is not motivation; it is simply operation. Moreover, there is no "unconscious" mind distinct from

the conscious, for the “unconscious” mind is conscious, though not of itself, just as the eyes see but do not see themselves.

There remains the supposition that the whole operation, the whole process of action which is man-and-universe, is a determined series of events in which every event is the inevitable result of past causes.

We cannot go into this problem exhaustively or even adequately. But it is perhaps enough to realize for the moment that this is one of the biggest “open questions” of science, which is far from reaching a decision. The idea that the past determines the present can be an illusion of language. Because we must describe the present in terms of the past, it would seem that the past “explains” the present. To say “how” something happened, we describe the chain of events of which it seemed to be a part.

The bottle smashed. It fell to the floor. I let it go. My fingers were slippery. I had soap on my hands. Is it legitimate to put the word “because” between, these statements? We do so as a rule, for we can make the safe bet that if I let go of the bottle, it will fall to the floor. But this does not prove that I caused it to fall, or that it *must* have fallen. Events look inevitable in retrospect because when they have happened, nothing can change them. Yet the fact that I can make safe bets could prove equally well that events are not *determined* but *consistent*. In other words, the universal process acts freely and spontaneously at every moment, but tends to throw out events in regular, and so predictable, sequences.

However this issue may be decided, the undivided mind certainly has the feeling of freedom, and certainly brings into the moral sphere a way of life which has all the marks of free and creative action.

It is easy to see that most of the acts which, in conventional morals, are called evil can be traced to the divided mind. By far the greater part of these acts come from exaggerated desires, desires for things which are not even remotely necessary for the health of mind and body, granting that “health” is a relative term. Such outlandish and insatiable desires come into being because man is exploiting his appetites to give the “I” a sense of security.

I am depressed, and want to get “I” out of this depression. The opposite of depression is elation, but because depression is not elation, I cannot force myself to be elated. I can, however, get drunk. This makes me wonderfully elated, and so when the next depression arrives, I have a quick cure. The subsequent depressions have a way of getting deeper and blacker, because I am not digesting the depressed state and eliminating its poisons. So I need

to get even drunker to drown them. Very soon I begin to hate myself for getting so drunk, which makes me still more depressed—and so it goes.

Or perhaps I have a large family, and am living in a mortgaged house on which I have spent all my savings. I have to work hard at a job in which I am not particularly interested in order to pay the bills. I don't mind working so much, but I keep wondering what will happen if I get sick, or if a war comes and I am drafted. I would rather not think about these things, so I want to get "I" out of this worry. For I am sure that I *shall* get sick if it goes on. But it's so hard to stop, and as this makes sickness more certain, the worrying digs deeper. I *must* find relief from this, and so in desperation I begin to "play the ponies," trying to offset the worry with the daily hope that my horse may win. And so *it* goes.

The conventional moralist has nothing to contribute to these problems. He can point out the frightful effects of alcoholism and gambling, but that is simply more fuel for depression and worry. He can promise rewards in heaven for suffering patiently endured, but that, too, is a gamble of a kind. He can attribute the depression or the worry to the social system, and urge the unfortunates to join the revolution.

In short, he can either frighten the "I" or encourage it, in one case making the individual run away from himself, and in the other making him run after himself. He can paint glowing pictures of the virtues and encourage others to find strength in the examples of great men. He can succeed to the extent of arousing the most vigorous efforts to imitate saintliness, to curb the passions, and to practice restraint and charity in action. Yet none of this brings anyone to freedom, for behind all the imitation and the discipline there is still motive.

If I am afraid, my efforts to feel and act bravely are moved by the fear, for I am afraid of fear, which is simply to say that my efforts to escape from what I am are moving in a circle. Beside the examples of saints and heroes I feel ashamed that I amount to nothing, and so I begin to practice humility because of my wounded pride, and charity because of my self-love. The urge is ever to make "I" amount to something. I must be right, good, a real person, heroic, loving, self-effacing. I efface myself in order to assert myself, and give myself away in order to keep myself. The whole thing is a contradiction.

The Christian mind has always been haunted by the feeling that the sins of the saints are worse than the sins of the sinners, that in some mysterious

way the one who is struggling for salvation is nearer to hell and to the heart of evil than the unashamed harlot or thief. It has recognized that the Devil is an angel, and as pure spirit is not really interested in the sins of the flesh. The sins after the Devil's heart are the intricacies of spiritual pride, the mazes of self-deception, and the subtle mockeries of hypocrisy where mask hides behind mask behind mask and reality is lost altogether.

The would-be saint walks straight into the meshes of this web because *he* would become a saint. His "I" finds the deepest security in a satisfaction which is the more intense for being so cleverly hidden—the satisfaction of being contrite for his sins, and contrite for taking pride in his contrition. In such an involved vicious circle the masks behind masks are infinite. Or, to put it in another way, he who would stand outside himself to kick himself, must then kick the self that stands outside. And so forever.

So long as there is the motive to become something, so long as the mind believes in the possibility of escape from what it is at this moment, there can be no freedom. Virtue will be pursued for exactly the same reason as vice, and good and evil will alternate as the opposite poles of a single circle. The "saint" who appears to have conquered his self-love by spiritual violence has only concealed it. His apparent success convinces others that he has found the "true way," and they follow his example long enough for the course to swing to its opposite pole, when license becomes the inevitable reaction to puritanism.

Of course it *sounds* as if it were the most abject fatalism to have to admit that I am what I am, and that no escape or division is possible. It seems that if I *am* afraid, then I am "stuck" with fear. But in fact I am chained to the fear only so long as I am trying to get away from it. On the other hand, when I do not try to get away I discover that there is nothing "stuck" or fixed about the reality of the moment. When I am aware of this feeling without naming it, without calling it "fear," "bad," "negative," etc., it changes instantly into something else, and life moves freely ahead. The feeling no longer perpetuates itself by creating the feeler behind it.

We can perhaps see now why the undivided mind is not moved into those escapes from the present which are usually called "evil." The further truth that the undivided mind is aware of experience as a unity, of the world as itself, and that the whole nature of mind and awareness is to be one with what it knows, suggests a state that would usually be called love. For the love that expresses itself in creative action is something much more than an

emotion. It is not something which *you* can "feel" and "know," remember and define. Love is the organizing and unifying principle which makes the world a *uni*verse and the disintegrated mass a community. It is the very essence and character of mind, and becomes manifest in action when the mind is whole.

For the mind *must* be interested or absorbed in something, just as a mirror must always be reflecting something. When it is not trying to be interested in itself—as if a mirror would reflect itself—it must be interested, or absorbed, in other people and things. There is no problem of how to love. We love. We are love, and the only problem is the direction of love, whether it is to go straight out like sunlight, or to try to turn back on itself like a "candle under a bushel."

Released from the circle of attempted self-love, the mind of man draws the whole universe into its own unity as a single dewdrop seems to contain the entire sky. This, rather than any mere emotion, is the power and principle of free action and creative morality. On the other hand, the morality of rules and regulations based on rewards and punishments, even when these are as intangible as the pain of guilt and the pleasure of self-respect, has no relation to free action. It is a way of ruling slaves by "benevolent exploitation" of their illusions, and, however far pursued, can never lead to freedom.

Where there is to be creative action, it is quite beside the point to discuss what we should or should not do in order to be right or good. A mind that is single and sincere is not interested in being good, in conducting relations with other people so as to live up to a rule. Nor, on the other hand, is it interested in being free, in acting perversely just to prove its independence. Its interest is not in itself, but in the people and problems of which it is aware; these are "itself." It acts, not according to the rules, but according to the circumstances of the moment, and the "well" it wishes to others is not security but liberty.

Nothing is really more inhuman than human relations based on morals. When a man gives bread in order to be charitable, lives with a woman in order to be faithful, eats with a Negro in order to be unprejudiced, and refuses to kill in order to be peaceful, he is as cold as a clam. He does not actually see the other person. Only a little less chilly is the benevolence springing from pity, which acts to remove suffering because it finds the sight of it disgusting.

But there is no formula for generating the authentic warmth of love. It cannot be copied. You cannot talk yourself into it or rouse it by straining at the emotions or by dedicating yourself solemnly to the service of mankind. Everyone has love, but it can only come out when he is convinced of the impossibility and the frustration of trying to love himself. This conviction will not come through condemnations, through hating oneself, through calling self-love all the bad names in the universe. It comes only in the awareness that one has no self to love.

IX. RELIGION REVIEWED

WE BEGAN THIS BOOK WITH THE ASSUMPTION THAT science and scientific philosophy give no grounds for religious belief. We did not argue the point, but took it as the point of departure. We adopted the prevalent view that the existence of God, of any absolutes, and of an eternal order beyond this world is without logical support or meaning. We accepted the notion that such ideas are of no value for scientific prediction, and that all known events can be explained more simply without them. At the same time, we said that religion had no need to oppose this view, for almost all the spiritual traditions recognize that there is a stage in man's development when belief—in contrast to faith—and its securities have to be left behind.

To this point, I do not think that we have claimed anything which cannot be verified by experiment, or asserted anything which seriously conflicts with a scientific view of the world. Yet we have now come to a position from which the principal ideas of religion and traditional metaphysics can once more become intelligible and meaningful—not as beliefs, but as valid symbols of experience.

Science and religion are talking about the same universe, but they are using different kinds of language. In general, the statements of science have to do with the past and the future. The scientist describes events. He tells us "how" things happen by giving us a detailed account of *what* has happened. He finds that events occur in various frequencies and orders, and on this basis he makes bets or predictions in the light of which we can make practical arrangements and adaptations to the course of events. To make

these bets, he does not need to know about God or eternal life. He needs to know the past—what has happened already.

On the other hand, the statements of religion have to do with the present. But both religious and scientific people are under the impression that religion is more concerned with the past and the future. This is a natural misunderstanding, because religion seems to make assertions about how this world began and how it will end. It has long been connected with prophecy, which is surely the same thing as prediction. It states that this world *was made* by God, and that he made it for a *purpose* which *will be* fulfilled in the distant future, in "the life of the world to come." It insists, furthermore, that man has an immortal soul, and prophesies that it *will* survive his physical death and live everlastingly.

The scientist therefore seems justified in saying that such predictions cannot be verified, and that they are made with precious little reference to past events known to have happened. When he tries to discover the grounds upon which these predictions are made, he finds them emotional rather than rational. Religious people *hope* or believe that these things will be true.

Nevertheless, in the history of every important religion there have been those who understood religious ideas and statements in a very different way. On the whole, this has been more true of the East than of the West, though Christian history contains a long list of men and women who could have talked on common ground with orthodox Hindus and Buddhists.

From this other and, we think, deeper point of view, religion is not a system of predictions. Its doctrines have to do, not with the future and the everlasting, but with the present and the eternal. They are not a set of beliefs and hopes but, on the contrary, a set of graphic symbols about present experience.

Traditionally, these symbols are of two kinds. One describes the religious way of understanding the present in the form of concrete images and stories. The other describes it in an abstract, negative language which is often similar to the language of academic philosophy. For convenience, we can call these two kinds of symbol the religious and the metaphysical. But we must remember that "metaphysic" in this sense is not speculative philosophy. It is not an attempt to anticipate science and give a logical description of the universe and its origins. It is a way of representing a knowledge of the present. Religious symbols are specially characteristic of

Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, whereas doctrines of the Oriental type are more metaphysical.

We said that science and religion are both talking about the same world, and throughout this book we have never been concerned with anything but everyday life, with things which can be seen, felt, and experienced. We shall therefore be told, by religious critics, that we are reducing religion to "naturalism," that we are identifying God with nature, and making a mockery and travesty of religion by taking away "its essential supernatural content."

But when you ask theologians what they mean by the "supernatural," they burst immediately into scientific language. They talk about a God having "concrete reality distinct from this universe," and speak of him in terms of past history and future predictions. They insist that the supernatural world is not of the same "order" as the universe studied by science, but exists on another plane of being invisible to our natural senses. It begins to sound like something psychic, something of the same order as the phenomena of telepathy, clairvoyance, and clairaudience.

Yet this is naturalism pure and simple; it is even pseudo-science. For science and naturalism are not necessarily concerned only with things visible to the senses. No one has seen electrons or quanta, nor been able to construct a sensual image of curved space. If psychic phenomena exist, there is no reason to suppose that they cannot be studied scientifically, and that they are not simply another aspect of "nature." Indeed, science is concerned with innumerable things which cannot be experienced with the senses, and which are not present to immediate experience—for example, the entire past, the process of gravity, the nature of time, and the weights of planets and stars. These invisible things are inferred from immediate experience by logic. They are hypotheses which seem to give a reasonable explanation of observed events. The theological God is exactly the same thing—a hypothesis accounting for all experiences.

When a theologian makes such a hypothesis he uses the methods of science and enters the field of science. He must expect, therefore, to be questioned, examined, and criticized by his fellow naturalists.

But the difference between the natural and the supernatural can be understood in a simpler and much more useful way. If "nature" is the province of science, we can say that nature is this world as it is named, measured, and classified. Nature is the world which thought has analyzed

and sorted into groups called “things.” It has, as we saw, given things an identity by naming them. It distinguishes motion from stillness by comparing something which moves rapidly in relation to something which moves slowly, though both move.

Thus the whole world of nature is relative and is produced by thought and comparison. Is the head “really” distinct from the neck? Why shouldn’t we have made the “thing” called head include the “thing” called neck, just as it includes the nose? It is a convention of thought that head and neck are two things instead of one. In this sense, the ancient metaphysicians are perfectly right when they say that the whole universe is a product of the mind. They mean the universe of “things.”

On the other hand, the supernatural and absolute world consists of the mysterious reality which we have so named, classified, and divided. This is not a product of the mind. But there is no way of defining or describing *what* it is. At every moment we are aware of it, and it is our awareness. We feel and sense it, and it is our feelings and sensations. Yet trying to know and define it is like trying to make a knife cut itself. What is this? This is a rose. But “a rose” is a noise. What is a noise? A noise is an impact of air waves on the eardrum. Then a rose is an impact of air waves on the eardrum? No, a rose is a rose … is a rose is a rose is a rose.…

Definition is simply making a one-to-one correspondence between groups of sense data and noises, but because noises are sense data, the attempt is ultimately circular. The real world which both provides these data and the organs wherewith to sense them remains unfathomably mysterious.

From this point of view we need have no difficulty in making sense of some of the ancient scriptures. The *Dhammapada*, a collection of sayings of the Buddha, begins: “All that we are is the result of what we have thought. It is founded on our thoughts; it is made up of our thoughts.” This is, in effect, the same statement that opens St. John’s Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.… All things were made by him (the Word), and without him was not anything made that was made.” By thoughts, or mental words, we distinguish or “make” things. Without thoughts, there are no “things”; there is just undefined reality.

If you want to be poetic, you can liken this undefined reality to the Father, because it is the origin or basis of “things.” You can call thought the Son “of one substance with the Father”—the Son “by whom all things were

made," the Son who must be crucified if we are to see the Father, just as we must look at reality without words to see it as it is. Thereafter the Son rises from the dead and returns to heaven, and, likewise, when we see reality as it is we are free to use thought without being fooled by it. It "returns to heaven" in the sense that we recognize it as part of reality, and not something standing outside it.

Otherwise, we can use the negative, metaphysical language about this undefined reality. It is the infinite, not the definite. It is the eternal, the ever-present, not the past and future, not the conventions of thought and time. It is the unchanging in the sense that the idea of change is but another word, another definition, which the reality *called* change surpasses. Obviously, if all movement is relative, there is no absolute movement. It would be meaningless to say that *all* bodies in the universe are moving uniformly at ten thousand miles per minute, because "all" has excluded any other body with respect to which they could be said to move.

Metaphysical language is negative because it is trying to say that words and ideas do not explain reality. It is not trying to persuade us that reality is something like a boundless mass of transparent jelly. It does not speak of some impalpable abstraction, but of this very world in which we live. This experience which we call things, colors, sounds, smells, tastes, forms, and weights is, in itself, no thing, no form, no number, no nothing—but at this moment we behold it. We are, then, beholding the God which traditional doctrines call the boundless, formless, infinite, eternal, undivided, unmoved, and unchanging Reality—the Absolute behind the relative, the Meaning behind thoughts and words.[1] Naturally the Meaning is meaningless because, unlike words, it does not *have* meaning but *is* meaning. By itself, a tree is meaningless, but it is the meaning of the word "tree."

It is easy to see that this kind of language, whether in its religious or metaphysical forms, can lead to all manner of misunderstanding. For when the mind is divided, and "I" wants to get away from present experience, the whole notion of a supernatural world is its happy hide-out. The "I" is resisting an unhappy change, and so clings to the "unchanging" Absolute, forgetting that this Absolute is also the "unfixed." When life provides some bitter experience, the "I" can only support it with the guarantee that it is part of the plan of a loving Father-God. But this very guarantee makes it impossible to realize the "love of God," which, as is well known, requires the giving up of "I."

The misunderstanding of religious ideas is vividly illustrated in what men have made of the doctrine of immortality, heaven, and hell. But now it should be clear that eternal life is the realization that the present is the only reality, and that past and future can be distinguished from it in a conventional sense alone. The moment is the "door of heaven," the "straight and narrow way that leadeth unto life," because there is no room in it for the separate "I." In *this* experience there is no one experiencing the experience. The "rich man" cannot get through this door because he carries too much baggage; he is clinging to the past and the future.

One might quote whole pages from the spiritual literature of all times and places to show that eternal life has been understood in this sense. The following from Eckhart will suffice:

> The Now-moment in which God made the first man and the Now-moment in which the last man will disappear, and the Now-moment in which I am speaking are all one in God, in whom there is only one Now. Look! The person who lives in the light of God is conscious neither of time past nor of time to come but only of one eternity.… Therefore he gets nothing new out of future events, nor from chance, for he lives in the Now-moment that is, unfailingly, "in verdure newly clad."

When you are dying and coming to life in each moment, would-be scientific predictions about what will happen after death are of little consequence. The whole glory of it is that we do not know. Ideas of survival and annihilation are alike based on the past, on memories of waking and sleeping, and, in their different ways, the notions of everlasting continuity and everlasting nothingness are without meaning.

It needs but slight imagination to realize that everlasting time is a monstrous nightmare, so that between heaven and hell as ordinarily understood there is little to choose. The desire to continue always can only seem attractive when one thinks of indefinite time rather than infinite time. It is one thing to have as much time as you want, but quite another to have time without end.

For there is no joy in continuity, in the perpetual. We desire it only because the present is empty. A person who is trying to eat money is always hungry. When someone says, "Time to stop now!" he is in a panic because

he has had nothing to eat yet, and wants more and more time to go on eating money, ever hopeful of satisfaction around the corner. We do not really want continuity, but rather a present experience of total happiness. The thought of wanting such an experience to go on and on is the result of being self-conscious in the experience, and thus incompletely aware of it. So long as there is the feeling of an "I" *having* this experience, the moment is not *all*. Eternal life is realized when the last trace of difference between "I" and "now" has vanished—when there is just this "now" and nothing else.

By contrast, hell or "everlasting damnation" is not the everlastingness of time going on forever, but of the unbroken circle, the continuity and frustration of going round and round in pursuit of something which can never be attained. Hell is the fatuity, the everlasting impossibility, of self-love, self-consciousness, and self-possession. It is trying to see one's own eyes, hear one's own ears, and kiss one's own lips.

To see, however, that life is complete in each moment—whole, undivided, and ever new—is to understand the sense of the doctrine that in eternal life God, the undefinable *this*, is all-in-all and is the Final Cause or End for which everything exists. Because the future is everlastingly unattainable, and, like the dangled carrot, *always* ahead of the donkey, the fulfillment of the divine purpose does not lie in the future. It is found in the present, not by an act of resignation to immovable fact, but in seeing that there is no one to resign.

For this is the meaning of that universal and ever-repeated religious principle that to know God, man must give up himself. It is as familiar as any platitude, and yet nothing has been harder to do, and nothing so totally misunderstood. How can a self, which is selfish, give itself up? Not, say the theologians, by its own power, but through the gift of divine grace, the power which enables man to achieve what is beyond his own strength. But is this grace given to all or to a chosen few, who, when they receive it, have no choice but to surrender themselves? Some say that it comes to all, but that there are those who accept its aid and those who refuse. Others say that it comes to a chosen elect, but still, for the most part, insist that the individual has the power to take it or leave it.

But this does not solve the problem at all. It replaces the problem of holding or surrendering the self by the problem of accepting or refusing divine grace, and the two problems are identical. The Christian religion contains its own hidden anwer to the problem in the idea that man can only

surrender himself “in Christ.” For “Christ” stands for the reality that there is no separate self to surrender. To give up “I” is a false problem. “Christ” is the realization that there is no separate “I.” “I do nothing of myself.… I and the Father are one.… Before Abraham was, I am.”

If there is any problem at all, it is to see that in this instant you have no “I” to surrender. You are completely free to do this at any moment, and nothing whatever is stopping you. This is our freedom. We are not, however, free to improve ourselves, to surrender ourselves, to lay ourselves open to grace, for all such split-mindedness is the denial and postponement of our freedom. It is trying to eat your mouth instead of bread.

Is it necessary to underline the vast difference between the realization that “I and the Father are one,” and the state of mind of the person who, as we say, “thinks he is God”? If, still thinking that there is an isolated “I,” you identify it with God, you become the insufferable ego-maniac who thinks himself successful in attaining the impossible, in dominating experience, and in pursuing all vicious circles to satisfactory conclusions.

I am the master of my fate;
I am the captain of my soul!

When the snake swallows his tail he has a swelled head. It is quite another thing to see that you are your “fate,” and that there is no one either to master it or to be mastered, to rule or to surrender.

Must we also insist that this loss of “I” in God is not a mystic miasma in which the “values of personality” are obliterated? The “I” was not, is not, and never will be a part of human personality. There is nothing unique, or “different,” or interesting about it. On the contrary, the more human beings pursue it, the more uniform, uninteresting, and impersonal they become. The faster things move in circles, the sooner they become indistinguishable blurs. It is obvious that the only interesting people are interested people, and to be completely interested is to have forgotten about “I.”

We can see, then, that the basic principles of philosophy, religion, and metaphysics may be understood in two entirely different ways. They can be seen as symbols of the undivided mind, expressions of the truth that in each moment life and experience are a complete whole. “God” is not a definition of this state but an exclamation about it. Ordinarily, however, they are used

as attempts to stand outside oneself and the universe to grasp them and to rule them. This process is circular, however complex and devious.

Because men have been circling for so many ages, the powers of technology have availed for little save to speed the process to a point of unbearable tension. Civilization is ready to fly apart by sheer centrifugal force. In such a predicament the self-conscious type of religion to which we have so long been accustomed is no cure, but part of the disease. If scientific thought has weakened its power we need have no regrets, for the "God" to which it could have brought us was not the unknown Reality which the name signifies, but only a projection of ourselves—a cosmic, discarnate "I" lording it over the universe.

The true splendor of science is not so much that it names and classifies, records and predicts, but that it observes and desires to know the facts, whatever they may turn out to be. However much it may confuse facts with conventions, and reality with arbitrary divisions, in this openness and sincerity of mind it bears some resemblance to religion, understood in its other and deeper sense. The greater the scientist, the more he is impressed with his ignorance of reality, and the more he realizes that his laws and labels, descriptions and definitions, are the products of his own thought. They help him to use the world for purposes of his own devising rather than to understand and explain it.

The more he analyzes the universe into infinitesimals, the more things he finds to classify, and the more he perceives the relativity of all classification. What he does not know seems to increase in geometric progression to what he knows. Steadily he approaches the point where what is unknown is not a mere blank space in a web of words but a window in the mind, a window whose name is not ignorance but wonder.

The timid mind shuts this window with a bang, and is silent and thoughtless about what it does not know in order to chatter the more about what it thinks it knows. It fills up the uncharted spaces with mere repetition of what has already been explored. But the open mind knows that the most minutely explored territories have not really been known at all, but only marked and measured a thousand times over. And the fascinating mystery of *what* it is that we mark and measure must in the end "tease us out of thought" until the mind forgets to circle and to pursue its own processes, and becomes aware that to *be* at this moment is pure miracle.

In ways that differ but little, this is the last word of Western and Eastern wisdom alike. The Hindu *Upanishads* say:

> He who thinks that God is not comprehended, by him God is comprehended; but he who thinks that God is comprehended knows him not. God is unknown to those who know him, and is known to those who do not know him at all.

Goethe says it in words which, to the modern mind, may be plainer:

> The highest to which man can attain is wonder; and if the prime phenomenon makes him wonder, let him be content; nothing higher can it give him, and nothing further should he seek for behind it; here is the limit.

Or there are the words of St. John of the Cross, one of the greatest seers of the Christian tradition:

> One of the greatest favors bestowed on the soul transiently in this life is to enable it to see so distinctly and to feel so profoundly that it cannot comprehend God at all. These souls are herein somewhat like the saints in heaven, where they who know him most perfectly perceive most clearly that he is infinitely incomprehensible; for those who have the less clear vision do not perceive so clearly as do these others how greatly he transcends their vision.

In such wonder there is not hunger but fulfillment. Almost everyone has known it, but only in rare instants when the startling beauty or strangeness of a scene drew the mind away from its self-pursuit, and for a moment made it unable to find words for the feeling. We are, then, most fortunate to be living in a time when human knowledge has gone so far that it begins to be at a loss for words, not at the strange and marvelous alone, but at the most ordinary things. The dust on the shelves has become as much of a mystery as the remotest stars; we know enough of both to know that we know nothing. Eddington, the physicist, is nearest to the mystics, not in his airier flights of fancy, but when he says quite simply, “Something unknown is doing we don’t know what.”

In such a confession thought has moved full circle, and we are again as children. To those still feverishly intent upon explaining all things, upon securing the water of life firmly in paper and string, this confession says nothing and means nothing but defeat. To others, the fact that thought has completed a circle is a revelation of what man has been doing, not only in philosophy, religion, and speculative science, but also in psychology and morals, in everyday feeling and living. His mind has been in a whirl to be away from itself and to catch itself.

Ye suffer from yourselves, none else compels,
None other holds you that ye live and die
And whir upon the wheel, and hug and kiss
its spokes of agony,
Its tire of tears, its nave of nothingness.

Discovering this the mind becomes whole: the split between I and me, man and the world, the ideal and the real, comes to an end. *Paranoia*, the mind beside itself, becomes *metanoia*, the mind with itself and so free from itself. Free from clutching at themselves the hands can handle; free from looking after themselves the eyes can see; free from trying to understand itself thought can think. In such feeling, seeing, and thinking life requires no future to complete itself nor explanation to justify itself. In this moment it is finished.

[1] This is likewise what Vedanta doctrine terms the Self, the *atman*, transcending all experienced “things.”